

Autumn is here, fungi abound, acorns are falling, weather has turned unsettled, and it's a busy time outdoors but it's time to knuckle down to get our Newsletter compiled and distributed.

Wecome to New members. Thanks to those who have contributed articles. Thanks to Roy Phillips- Harral who has offered to try out the role of Area contact for West Somerset. David German is thinking of relinquishing the role of Area contact for Heart of the Levels and welcomes offers to help in this area. Get in touch with him direct. We had our committee meeting in September and were pleased that SWT's new CEO Georgia Stokes

and Volunteer administrator Rhiannon Route joined us. There are several changes in staffing at SWT HQ and with the Trust's current five-year Strategy being to March 2020, a Public consultation is to take place to develop the next strategy and it is hoped our members will have their say "Towards a Wilder Somerset". The SWT website is being updated/improved and that will include our own PCNR Network pages and information when we get round to it.

Landscape Review, Conservation Covenants, Succession

Anne Halpin (SWT Ecologist) has let us know about these:

The publication of the Julian Glover Landscape Review may be of interest to some of our members.

It's a lengthy document, the summary gives a good overview & it includes some excellent photos. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/833163/landscapes-review-final-report.pdf

Also, the consultation on Conservation Covenants is complete and the key outcomes were:

- The Government WILL legislate for conservation covenants in the Environment Bill.
- They will be voluntary and private legally-binding agreements and can bind all future owners of a site.
- · For-profit bodies will be allowed to apply to be

responsible bodies. They will be designated by the Secretary of State if they meet relevant guidelines. They can be delisted if they do not perform their function.

The full response document can be found here: https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/conservation-covenants/outcome/summary-of-responses-and-government-response

The Small Woods Association has had meetings, a consultation and sought legal advice regarding Succession issues. The Board has agreed to take the exploration further and will hold a workshop (probably in the South Midlands). "Within the next step, we will need to investigate whether all the aspirations expressed by members are achievable, at the same time as designing a scheme that is straight forward enough to administer and clear enough to all parties involved." Anyone wishing to find out more, please email ian.baker@smallwoods.org.uk

Photo Above: It's Autumn ©Valerie Godsmark



Those members who decided to venture to High Littleton near Timsbury to spend time at Rugbourne Farm were treated to a most interesting visit. The unforseen dampness of the morning didn't detract from seeing the development of the Private Nature Reserve described by Zanna in the "Spring 2019" Newsletter. An introduction to the significance of the area to Geology was given by Zanna as we were shown the noticeboard by the Right of Way, detailing the work of William Smith and the nearby coal canal. Management issues including fly-tipping, mowing regimes, use of Yellow Rattle, squirrel damage and control, Ash dieback, tree planting and maintenance as well as pond weeds were discussed during the leisurely stroll across the meadow to the copses, wilderness area and large pond.

The garden had its own delights with many plants for colour and pollinators.

Ready for a break, we were shown into the large kitchen of Rugbourne Farm where Andy played host with offers of coffee, tea & biscuits whilst the participants created a hubbub of Networking chatter. Suitably refreshed, our hosts offered a guided tour of the house in which details of its restoration were given. From damp cellars (put to good use) with stone steps and hand pump demonstrated by Zanna, quirky hidden

Save the date

Sunday 12th July at Cooks farm courtesy of Patricia Stainton: details in PCNR Network "Spring 2020" Newsletter

Future programme is yet to be decided

Offers of venues for visits & ideas for themes for workshops welcomed. We realise some of you with Wildlife gardens within your PNR may well have offered to open them in support of SWT: if you are undecided, get in touch with Kate Wilson at SWT or Susan Bates who has "volunteered" to help with this.

Errata

Sorry for any inconvenience caused by part of an email address missing in Spring 2019 newsletter: Pam Langton's email address is **pmlangton49@icloud.com** the .com had gone astray!



staircase, ground floor rooms in part furnished to replicate the time William Smith lodged there (his wonderful map resplendent in the hallway), through the bedrooms to the super large top floor lounge/games room and into the loft with its roof and insulation replaced. I was particularly impressed by the way in which modern materials had been incorporated with the old, original, failing materials to ensure structural strength and authenticity: such wonderful use of Oak timbers.

Study/workshop areas were included as Zanna and Andy still continue their professional as well as family lives. This certainly wasn't a restoration for the faint-hearted and there must have been some low points over the many years during which the house was having to be more or less rebuilt to conserve it at the same time as having the vision to develop the grounds for increased Biodiversity and wildlife.

This was a visit with a difference and we were privileged that Zanna and Andy felt able to share their home with us (& it was for more than the allotted time!) No complaints. THANKS Further information on Rugbourne Farm and William Smith is available on the internet & in case you hadn't guessed, Andy is a practising Architect.

andy@andypatersonarchitects.com

Tree-planting schemes this Autumn/Winter

With Tree planting being given a boost in regard to Climate change/Climate emergency demand for saplings has increased. We heard a "whisper" the other day that the "Woodland Trust" had run out of trees for this season. If you had a project planned, check your supply is ensured and remember to check provenance of "local" native saplings and health checks if dealing with non-natives. Even better Grow your own &/or encourage regeneration on your reserve.

Pleased to report that at least one PCNR Network member attended the Lichen course & has enrolled on the Advanced one (see "Spring 2019 News)

Photo: Rugnourne Meadow and copses (left) and garden & side view of Rugbourne Farm (right) @Valerie Godsmark

Thoughts on our PNR by Ian Davies founder & former Chair/Co-ordinator of the Network

Origins

In 1992 when we retreated to Somerset from life in in the London orbit we found ourselves with 30 acres of a former dairy farm on a hill right on the edge of Bruton town. The family had a general interest in wildlife and one son who was a qualified ecologist and field botanist so we drew up a management strategy for the holding and qualified for the then Countryside Stewardship Scheme. This helped with external advice and defraying some set up and annual management costs.

General strategy

Essentially the bulk of the acreage was grassland, most of which was agriculturally 'improved' so botanically impoverished. We resolved to manage this as hay meadows for the benefit of wildlife by maintaining a grazing and haymaking regime and avoiding pesticides and fertilisers.

With a steep wooded scarp slope of an acre or so facing towards the town we planted more trees and hedgerows to enhance the woodland and woodland edge environment.

A three quarter acre garden was developed in the area surrounding the house and ponds were created using liners as the hill consists of limestone and alkaline clay, part of a very narrow geological band which runs across this part of Somerset.

Additionally our ecologist son set up a series of experimental plots in the fields to monitor native plant species' response to three different grass management regimes (see web site-just Google Lusty Hill Farm). This supported his earning a PhD on the subject.

25 years on

This all started in 1992/3 and we have been observing the outcomes ever since. Without being scientifically diligent we have noted that there is a heartbreaking backdrop of a noticeable decline in biodiversity and bioabundance, both of which are now extensively written about in the environmental media. The worst aspect is the little appreciated decline in food chain base species. Our hayfields no longer flicker with masses of grasshoppers and crickets while our hedgerows no longer rustle with plentiful voles. They are still around but are no longer abundant and in consequence the higher predators are petering out too.

Typical farmland birds such as Yellowhammer, Greenfinch, and Linnet are scarce while the Cuckoo last called in 2008 and the Little Owls similarly vanished. We still have our bats and Swallows to entertain us but frankly we would not be surprised to find that a lack of food will drive them away before many more years elapse. It seems our four legged predators are thinning out too. We have not seen a Stoat for at least ten years while Foxes appear for a while but soon vanish again. At one time we had fox cubs playing in front of the house and their parents mating on the lawn at the back!

Photo: Adonis Blue ©lan Davies

Rabbits, a major food source have come and gone as diseases have swept through and survivors then recover and become a plague again. This boom and bust disrupts the predation chain. Our Starling swarms are half the size they were and so it

Amidst the gloom of this now very obvious decline there are species which have managed to thrive of which Badgers are a prime example. However they are victims of their own success which has resulted in the culling programmes now taking place. Fortunately the malign influence of the anti-badger lobby has not yet reached our sett but you never know what tomorrow will bring in the current feverish political climate.

We have had some success with plant life and our most diverse field now sports a yellow carpet of Cowslips in Spring and a good show of Spotted Orchids originating from our introduction of a few plugs we bought from a specialist grower. Other species such as Bee, Fragrant and Pyramidal Orchids come and go in their mysterious way. We have taken hay off every year and introduced Yellow Rattle to weaken the grasses.

Equally gratifying has been the spread of the Marbled White butterfly from being scarce in just one field to abundant in at least three others. The last two summers I have seen up to five Marbled Whites on one Knapweed plant. Somehow, too, our small colony of Long Eared and Pipistrelle Bats in our buildings have clung on and entertain us on warmer evenings. Sweeping up their droppings in the attic is an annual chore which is a blessing really!

We now have a grand project created by our older son, Angus, namely, four specially created butterfly banks which are separated by impoverished land planted with native species.

Last year we saw the first payback in a relative abundance of Common Blue and Small Copper around the banks and a new 'tick' in the form of a Brown Argus. This year we 'ticked' an Adonis Blue. Whether we can attract more new species only time will tell but it is a pleasure to watch the seasonal parade amongst the show of wild flowers Angus has established.



Thoughts on our PNR by Ian Davies founder & former Chair/Co-ordinator of the Network



We are in our 80's now and like most PNR owners I fret that on our demise the land we leave will be abused or neglected by subsequent owners. Having conducted a survey of ways to protect the land and written it up for 'British Wildlife' magazine some years ago I found that long term protection for land which is not of SSSI standard is difficult. To help secure the future we have arranged for the holding to be split in the event of its sale so that the more desirable parts for wildlife will go to Angus, the ecologist.

The wildlife which still surrounds us continues to give us immense pleasure even as we worry about its decline and is an antidote to the other worries we have.

The Importance of Deadwood

By Valerie Godsmark



coppice have "stems" with varying lengths of decay. In our management for the past 18 years, we have a policy "to retain deadwood as it is an important part of the woodland structure offering important habitat for fungi, lichens, bryophytes and invertebrates as well as providing useful nesting sites for several species of birds and possibly roosts for bats". The Wet Woodland area is left as low intervention. We aim to identify and map Veteran/potential Veteran trees.

Current guidance for UKFS woodland management gives a figure of a minimum of 20 tonnes of deadwood to be retained (or created) per hectare.

We keep a limited number of tracks/rides open for access so some obstructions do

need to be moved for safety reasons and this would be necessary if a site has a Public Right of Way. We use some wood for firewood (removed from site) and utilise a small amount of good quality timber. No dead-wood is ever burned on site: dead-hedges, windrows, debris dams, brash piles all help to provide niches for a good variety of wildlife particularly invertebrates (slugs, snails, insect larvae, beetles, moths, butterflies, spiders, woodlice etc), and thereby food for several bird and small mammal species. It is good biomass for all parts of the food chain.

It is tempting to tidy up a garden, field, meadow, pond, stream, woodland area but if it doesn't pose a hazard, try to leave any dead-wood where it is and let it rot down naturally. If it must be moved, try to place it nearby in contact with the soil, stacked tightly, long axis lying east to west, preferably where there is a fair amount of shade and dampness. Don't put it where it will need to be moved again. Do allow bramble, bracken etc to grow over it. **Deadwood matters!**

Several years ago in the early days of our ownership and management of Park Wood I attended a most interesting weekend course at the Kingcombe Centre in Dorset. Its title was "Life after Death". I have to admit, friends wondered what I was up to (they're still wondering!) The course was run by Dr Roger Key of Natural England, ably assisted by Jonathan Webb & the subtitle was "Conservation of Invertebrates in Deadwood." The fauna of saproxylic (dead wood) species is threatened throughout Europe and Britain is important for this fauna. Some are very rare, some rare & some not so rare but could number about 2000.

I asked a question of David Northcote-Wright at a PNR workshop "Can you have too much deadwood in a woodland?" His reply "It's not all dead is it?" Our woodland has a lot of deadwood being an Ancient Woodland site which for many years had no active management. It has standing deadwood; whole mature trees uprooted and lying on the ground; broken limbs hanging from mature Oak & Ash trees. Many of the "over-stood" Hazel and Alder

Photo: Bee Orchids ©lan Davies, Deadwood habitat ©Valerie Godsmark

Background

When we moved into our new house, seven years ago, it came with a 0.5 Ha (1.25 acre) field of sloping rough grassland surrounded by hedges, in various conditions, and a soggy bottom with a spring. We decided to use a small part for a kitchen garden, erected a greenhouse and planted some fruit trees (the field is shown as an orchard on the old Ordnance Survey map); the rest was to be used as a Private Nature Reserve (PNR).

Initially I planned to create a wildflower meadow. As there appeared to be few wildflowers present some seed from Goren Organics was sown. This has subsequently led to the establishment of yellow rattle and some black knapweed. Other wildflowers have come along and I gather some seed for sowing, either in mown areas or within the grass, and the wildflower diversity seems to be increasing, along with the weeds.

After a few years mowing, the toll in dead frogs and slowworms, and the increasing quantity of weeds such as nettles and docks, led me to conclude this would never make a good wildflower meadow and would be better managed for its amphibians and reptiles, being only partially cut in the winter.

Those hedges we own have been cut, laid and fiddled with to improve their thickness. The run-off from a spring has been dammed to form an area of bogs and shallow ponds some 50m x 2m.



Wildlife Observation

I am fortunate, we live on the side of the upper Yarty valley and from a bedroom window I can look down on two thirds of my PNR. This make an ideal hide allowing me to see animals and birds that otherwise would be hidden to me.

My other asset (all be it a rather dubious one) is Tilly. Tilly has decided to move in with us and now brings in a succession of prey gathered from near the house. Again, this shows me animals of which I would otherwise be unaware, although I wish she never caught them.

A week or two after moving in I spotted bats outside my bedroom window and soon realised we were hosting a maternity roost in the loft.

Species Recording

From the beginning I wanted to keep a record of species seen on our PNR and in the garden. Initially I tried using a spreadsheet, based on the SERC template. However, I soon realised while a spreadsheet was fine for recording it would

Photo: Part of meadow @Nick Bentley

not facilitate analysis of the data and the creation of reports. Features I required from my recording tool included:

- Managing hundreds of records made over many years.
- Reporting once where a species has been recorded many times.
- Listing species in a taxonomic hierarchy to help my understanding.
- Not needing to enter the full taxonomic hierarchy with each entry.
- Inclusion of both common and scientific names.
- · Production of reports.
- Extraction of data for submission to SERC.
- The ability to slice and dice the data as required for reporting and analysis.

To achieve this, I put together a simple Access database.

For the bats I carry out roost counts, trying to count the bats as they leave the roost of an evening. These are recorded on a spreadsheet and entered onto the National Bat Monitoring Programme website. I am now counting weekly, to build up a picture of numbers throughout the Summer season, from April to October.

Species Identification and Classification

While some species are straightforward to identify, with many books and online resources, I found online identification seriously limited.

Google Images don't always give a name and similar images can appear under different names because, I think, it only references images, from many sources, relying on the author for correct identification.

Specialist websites offer reliable identification, but these are often limited to relatively concise groups of species, such as bumblebees or amphibians. They can however recommend and supply specialist books or publications for more complex taxa, such as lichens or wildflowers.

Classification was another problem. Initially I used Wikipedia but found the classification of plants differed from that of animals because different authors use different taxonomic classification systems. With my database I couldn't cope with different taxonomic structures.

Eventually I came across the Natural History Museum (NHM) website http://www.nhm.ac.uk/our-science/data/uk-species.html which provides a common classification between all taxa. From the NHM site you can enter a common name and it will tell you the preferred common name, the conservation status of the species and a standardised taxonomic hierarchy. It also provides links to Encyclopaedia of Life that gives approved images and further information about the species. I believe the NHM is the reference for other UK sites such as NBN Atlas.

Along with Grab a Grid Reference, these sites make up my main sources for classifying species.

Species Database

Although I use common names the binomial (scientific) name and the associated family are included for each record. Where no common name exists the binomial name is used as the

common name. The binomial name defines which species is recorded to avoid any confusion between common names. Within the database other tables list the higher order taxa by scientific name, with a common description where possible, and linked to permit reporting with a hierarchical structure. Reports can be produced by either the common, or scientific, names.

To date I have identified 297 different species, although many more still need to be identified once suitable reference sources are identified or purchased. Of these 40 species are of conservation concern with 10 having protected status, the most notable being:

- · Natterer's Bat
- · Brown Long-Eared Bat
- · Hazel Dormouse
- · Slow-worm
- Common Toad

· Palmate Newt

New records are being made all the time and new species discovered or identified. I record anything that catches my interest; but sometimes I'll set out to record groups of species, such as butterflies or birds.

The Future

Our PNR is progressing nicely with an increasing number of plant and animal species being seen and identified. The hedges and trees are filling out and more wildflowers are appearing in the meadow and in odd corners. The management routines are now established and seem to be showing results so will be continued, with minor adaptions to address particular issues as they arise.

The range of habitats provided for wildlife, such as brushwood piles, compost and grass heaps, stone piles and banks, will be maintained and where possible improved, to provide as many resources for wildlife as possible.

Ash Dieback By Valerie Godsmark

I am trying to be very optimistic: surely some of these, our best known trees will be resilient. There are some very frightening statistics about and some "local" articles which don't seem to be entirely correct in their presumptions. It is true that Ash trees are one of the UK's most common tree species which readily seed and spread. They benefit a vast range of Biodiversity including 45 obligate species (found only on Ash) eg Cramp ball/King Alfred's cake fungus and it's associated weevil. The number and age of trees which will succumb to the disease will not be fully known for several seasons maybe years. Land owners with roadside Ash or Ash adjacent to Rights of Way need to be aware that Ash Dieback can cause the wood to become brittle and this can pose a risk to contractors/workers etc. Not every Ash tree that looks a bit tired with early loss of leaves can be assumed to have Ash dieback. In our area, we've had 18 months of drier than usual weather, temperatures warmer than the norm, unseasonal warm temperatures and unpredictable storm events. Some trees appear stressed and they are not only Ash trees. In one week we had 3 very large Ash branches down, a very large Oak branch and 2 Alder. The Ash and Oak were in full leaf with no sign of disease. Was this nature's way of self-pollarding to ensure survival of the remainder? The Alder

was partly rotten and brought its neighbour down. In regard to "Deadwood" unfortunately 2 of the branches were across boundaries and 2 fell across trackways so had to be moved: a compromise between firewood resource and future deadwood.

Useful reading for those with Ash trees:

Article by Ruth Mitchell of the James Hutton Institute in Smallwoods Summer 2019 "Replacing the Ash: What's in an Ash?" www.hutton.ac.uk/ash-dieback

"Managing Ash Dieback-case studies 2019 = new publication from Forestry Commission and RFS www.rfs.org.uk/news/2019/7/managing- ash-dieback-10-case-studies/

A free guide to dealing with ash tree dieback has just been published by one of the UK's largest environmental planning and forestry consultancies. Lockhart Garratt prepared the guide **Sunset for Ash Trees** to help landowners, farmers and anyone with responsibility for managing and maintaining locations where ash trees grow. The guide includes sections on what ash dieback is and how it spreads, as well as looking at the impact of the disease, how it can best be managed and what a tree owner's specific responsibilities are.

Susan Bates: request car share to Knepp estate

I want to visit the Rewilding project in West Sussex next year but as it is quite a long way is anyone else interested in sharing a car? Get in touch with Susan by email: **susanmbates@hotmail.co.uk**

SWT Public consultation: "Towards a Wilder Somerset"

Some details are given on pages 32 and 33 of the current Autumn/Winter 2019 "Somerset Wildlife Magazine". It will be looking at 4 main areas 3 of which are aligned to SWT's charitable objects and one which affects them all (Climate breakdown). More information will be given at the Trust's AGM & members'

day Saturday 9th November at the McMillan Theatre in Bridgwater. Hope to see you there: say "Hello". The consultation is to be a Public one so please try to be involved whether you are SWT member or not.

Last autumn I reported on my rescue of a roadside Common Toadflax plant (Linaria vulgaris), which I brought home and potted up, whereupon a host of little black Paragus hoverflies descended on it, which I fancy were probably responsible for the plant setting its flat black seeds which I shook out from the pale brown papery seedheads a few weeks later. I sowed these straight away in a pot of soil-based compost, which I countersunk in my outdoor nursery bed so that the seeds would be subjected to a winter microclimate but without the extremes experienced by leaving the pots fully exposed to the air. And it worked! By early spring there was a crowd of little seedlings, which I subsequently thinned out and potted on, finally bringing on about thirty plants which duly flowered in their turn.

This is hardly rocket science and the likes of Charles Flower or the team at Emorsgate Seeds (or indeed many PCNR members!) do this sort of thing all the time. But it was a thrill, nonetheless, and immensely satisfying. I found homes for most of the offspring but planted a few (as well as the parent plant) in tubs on my patio, to very pleasing effect. Just before I sat down to write this the plant nearest the open door had been visited in quick succession by a Common Carder-bee and a Green-veined White butterfly.

I'm still busy with the job in Hampshire I started this time last year, and last week noticed the roadside displays of Toadflax again along the A303, but something else caught my attention. This was that the plants were all compact so that the effect was almost that of a Toadflax Lawn – rather like a Chamomile Lawn. The mower used by the Highways Agency's contractor must have cut the plants at just such a height as to "top" them, taking out the main shoots, which can in fact get a bit leggy, and encouraging a proliferation of shorter flowering side-shoots, to great effect.



Now as these glorious Indian-summer days of this amazing September begin to fade, I guess the Toadflax display will follow suit, but it's certainly made its mark. I still have a few spare second generation plants if anyone would like some: tel. 01278 671354. I only ask for refund of postage.

Public Liability Insurance for PCNRs

By Valerie Godsmark

Several of our Woodland owner members have PLI insurance with RAP. It can be expensive for small parcels of land but very reasonable for large ones. I was asked to make further enquiries & received this reply from Roger Pittaway.

We only insure woodland but occasionally include open land if contained in the wood.

If woods contain water, mineshafts, quarries, other hazards then these will be judged on their individual circumstances.

We do not insure structures or machinery.

Everyone pays the same premium irrespective of size of wood.

Much more on website.

Kevin Brown (01382 735122) at our broking team at Clark Thomson Ltd is really the one to contact if you require advice since RAP Ltd is only authorised by the FCA to give information.

Roger A Pittaway Tel: 07791 272276 email: enquiries@r-a-p.co.uk

Website: www.r-a-p.co.uk

(Rural Arbor Products Ltd P.O. Box 4692, Shrewsbury, Shropshire SY1 9BU)

Photo: Common Toadflax @Chris Smith

Remember:

Remember

to check out Somerset Wildlife Trust events. There are always lots of fun, interesting and informative events for all of the family happening all across Somerset. To find out more visit **somersetwildlife.org/events**

Remember

to keep Ruth White our "Volunteer Administrator" up-to-date if there are changes in email addresses, personal circumstances or reserve ownership. If you can provide an email contact it will help to cut costs and save time in printing. We can communicate more quickly to the half of the 200+ members who have given an email address.

Remember

to mention the PCNR Network to new owners if you move away: they may need encouragement and help.

Remember

What do you, the members of the Network want? Got a question? Get in touch. Let Ruth, Valerie or your Area contact know.

What next will depend on the Network members and the

team: our next committee meeting is scheduled for **11.00am** *Tuesday 10th March 2020* at Somerset Wildlife Trust HQ 34 Wellington Rd Taunton. We welcome interest from any PCNR members who would like to join us ideally as Area contacts for Mendip Hills, East Mendip, Wells and Central East. OR to get involved to help the Network to develop and thrive. We aim to publish the next Newsletter in Spring 2020 and articles are welcomed. Previous Newsletters and information are on the PCNR web page: see under Reserves on Somerset Wildlife Trust site but note the only contacts for the Network are the up-to-date ones in this issue.

Remember Biosecurity!

KEEP IT CLEAN: Don't give pests & diseases an easy ride

THINK KIT: clean soil & debris from boots, clothing & tools before leaving any site.

THINK PLANTS: ensure they are sourced responsibly; Keep records of purchases & suppliers; Monitor plants for signs of ill health.

THINK MATERIALS: source landscaping materials from areas known to be free of pests & diseases.

Find out more at **forestry.gov.uk/biosecurity**

Please note: opinions expressed herein are those of the individual writers & do not necessarily agree with Somerset Wildlife Trust or other members of the PCNR committee

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